DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 309 358 CG 021 820

AUTHOR Gurman, Ernest B.
TITLE Barriers to Occupational Achievement.
PUB DATE Mar 89
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association (35th, Washington, DC, March 22-25, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Achievement; College Students; Employment; Employment Opportunities; Females; *Goal Orientation; Higher Education; *Occupational Aspiration; *Self Concept; *Sex Differences; *Underachievement

ABSTRACT

The under-representation of women in prestigious occupations and the lower average pay women earn has been of concern for many years. This study investigated two alternative explanations for this under-representation of females in prestigious and higher paying occupations. The first explanation was external barriers such as discrimination, and the second was internal barriers such as attitudes and expectations of the women themselves. The subjects were 216 female and 149 male undergraduates enrolled in an introductory core course in a large southeastern university. Subjects were asked to indicate their career goal, reasons for their choice, expected income, probability of achieving goal, perceived opportunities in their chosen fields, degree of satisfaction with their major, and relevant personal data. Significant differences were identified between the ultimate career goals, the reasons for their choices of careers, the perceived job opportunities, and the rewards male and female subjects expected from their careers. These findings lend support to the idea that women, disproportionately represented in higher paying occupations, are significantly restricted by internal barriers. (Author/ABL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED309358

Barriers to Occupational Achievement

Ernest B. Gurman

University of Southern Mississippi

Running Head: BARRIERS TO OCCUPATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

CG 021 820

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

This research investigated two alternative explanations for the under-representation of females in prestigious and higher paying occupations. The first was external barriers such as discrimination, and the second was internal barriers such as attitudes and expectations of women themselves. The subjects were 216 female and 149 male undergraduates enrolled in an introductory core course in a large Southeastern University. Using a questionnaire, significant differences were identified between the ultimate career goals, the reasons for their choices of careers, the perceived job opportunities, and the rewards male and female subjects expected from their careers. These findings lend support to the idea that women, disproportionately represented in higher paying occupations, are significantly restricted by internal barriers.

Barriers to Occupational Achievement

The under-representation of women in prestigious occupations, and the lower average pay women earn has been of concern for many years (Barnett and Baruch, 1974). At least two explanations for this situation exist. Societal sex role stereotypes and attitudes toward female competence and women in management constitute external barriers which have limited access to higher paying occupations (O'Leary, 1974). The other is internal barriers, such as attitudes, expectations and behaviors on the part of women which may, do to previous socialization, serve to inhibit the expression of upward occupational aspirations (Soloman, Bishop, and Bresser (1986). Strange and Rea (1983) observed that both males and females chose their college major for very traditional reasons, i.e., male-dominated fields were selected for their status and potential for material gain, and female-dominated fields for their value on service and interpersonal skills. Barnett (1975), in a study of sex differences and age trends in relationship to occupational preferences among young people ages 9 to 17, found the correlation between occupational preference and prestige was higher for males than for females. She concluded that males learn to prefer prestigious occupations and female learn to avoid them. Thus social learning, in addition to external barriers, may contribute to career preferences and erect

attitudinal barriers that result in lowering overall job status and average earnings of women.

Women are now more accepted in nontraditional roles. Nevertheless, inequities continue to demand examination of these barriers and the validity of assumptions generally adopted about women and work. The purpose of the present study was to examine more closely these two explanations about the differences in career achievement patterns of males and females in our society.

Method

Subjects and Materials

149 male and 216 female undergraduate students enrolled in three sections of an introductory core course at a large Southeastern University volunteered to respond to a questionnaire entitled "Career Aspirations." Subjects were asked to indicate (1) their ultimate career goal, (2) the reasons for this choice, (3) the yearly income they expected to receive from the job, (4) the expected probability of achieving their career goal, (5) the perceived job opportunities in their chosen field, (6) their degree of satisfaction with their current major, and (7) relevant personal data (e.g. age, race, sex, major, classification, education level of each parent, and occupation of each parent).

Statistics listed in the 1986 Monthly Labor Review research summary entitled "Weekly Earnings in 1985: a Look at More than 200 Occupations," were used to obtain realistic expected earnings for

the various career goals (Mellor, 1986).

Statistics

Two types of analyses were used in this study. Multiple correlation was used to verify specifically hypothesized relationships and to explore other possible relationships. T-tests were also used to compare group means for which differences were expected to exist.

Results

As expected, and confirming earlier research with younger subjects (Barnett, 1975), the mean salaries of jobs to which students aspired, was significantly greater for males (M = $48,471) than females (M = $38,217, $t(258) = 3.23$, $p<.001$). Both males and females overestimated the income they expected to receive; males significantly more than females. Males overestimated their potential income by an average of $8,319 (M = $56,790), and females overestimated their income by an average of only $2,057 (M = $40,274, $t(195) = 194$, $p<.05$. In addition, there was a significant negative correlation between perceived job opportunities in their chosen field and the job's estimated salary for females ($r = -.1311$, $p = .037$). Conversely, there was a significant positive correlation between perceived job opportunities and the job's estimated salary for males ($r = .2482$, $p = .002$).

Regarding subjects' aspirations to a particular career, their

stated reasons were categorized as either extrinsic (money or status), or intrinsic (self-satisfaction or altruism). Of those responding to that particular item, 219 gave intrinsic reasons, estimating their salary at $43,333, and 92 subjects gave extrinsic reasons, estimating their salary at $57,418. It was also was found that 81% of the females who responded gave intrinsic reasons and expected an average salary of $34,788, compared with a salary of $63,147 among females responding with extrinsic reasons. ($t(178) = 3.03$, $p<.003$).

Other findings of interest concerned expected grades and parental education. There was no significance difference between males and females on the grades they expected from the introductory core course in which they were enrolled. This contradicts to some extent the results reported by Vollmer (1984), who found female undergraduates in a Norwegian university had significantly lower grade expectancy than males prior to taking examinations. Also, female estimates of expected salaries were found to be negatively correlated with the mother's education level ($r = -.1498$, $p = .02$). This negative relationship was present with the father's education level, but not significantly so.

Discussion

These data indicate that women may, in part, be under-represented in higher paying occupations because social learning leads them to aspire to less prestigious positions. The

choice of careers, based predominantly on intrinsic reasons by females and extrinsic reasons by males, supports earlier findings that males and females choose college majors for traditional reasons. Females appear to have more realistic career aspirations, and expectations of earnings they would receive from their chosen career goals. Unfortunately, a realistic outlook may be another internal barrier preventing them from striving for higher paying nontraditional roles and taking advantage of existing opportunities. These findings, of course, do not deny the existence of discrimination and other situational factors adversely affecting women in the work place, nor do they eliminate the possibility that females often do not aspire to higher paying careers simply because they view the competition as keener with greater chance of success in lower paying careers. The similar grade expectations of males and females offers some consolation. Although females expected less income from their careers and had lower expectations of job opportunities in higher paid fields, this did not represent a general lowering of expectations for themselves in other areas such as grades. Another reassuring note was that females were not slavishly following in the footsteps of their parents. The negative correlation between parents education level and female aspirations indicates they hope to improve their lot in life, and believe the opportunities are there for those who try.

References

Barnett, R. C., and Baruch, G. (1974). Occupational and educational aspirations and expectations. Washington, D. C.: National Institute of Education.

Barnett, R. C. (1975). Sex differences and age trends in occupational preference and occupational prestige. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 22, 35-38.

Mellor, E. F. (1986). Research summary - weekly earnings in 1985: a look at more than 200 occupations. Monthly Labor Review, 109, 28-32.

O'Leary, V. E. (1974). Some attitudinal barriers to occupational aspirations in women. Psychological Bulletin, 81, 809-826.

Solomon, E. E., Bishop, R. C., and Bresser, (1986). Organization moderators of gender differences in career development: A facet classification. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 29, 27-41.

Strange, C. C., and Rea, S. R. (1983). Career choice considerations and sex role self-concept of male and female undergraduates in nontraditional majors. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 23, 219-226.

Vollmer, F. (1984). Sex differences in personality and expectancy. Sex-Roles, 11, 1121-1139.